

Value of books depends on condition ▶ Page 9B



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WEEKEND EDITION



# The FREEMAN

Waukesha County's Daily Newspaper

## The FREEMAN'S 2016 CITIZEN of the YEAR

### Dan Erschen

City of Pewaukee manufacturer values employees, family and friends and approaches life in a humble, selfless manner

Uses health lessons learned to help others with MS

By Katherine Michalets  
Freeman Staff

CITY OF PEWAUKEE — Entering the gym in the Wisconsin Metal Parts warehouse on a Wednesday, the mood is light as people of varying ages pedal an exercise bike or move in a steady rhythm on an elliptical machine.

They also have a variety of physical capabilities — some are in wheelchairs and others are able to spend 30 minutes walking quickly on a treadmill. Moving from station to station with motivational words, a smile and a helping hand is Dan Erschen, who has overcome significant physical challenges due to multiple sclerosis, and in turn, has opened up his company's gym to others struggling with the same condition.

He insists it is these people dealing with MS who motivate him, but they in turn credit Erschen with an improvement in their physical and emotional health.

"We are all being called together for a reason bigger than our vision and I don't want to be a limitation for what that vision can be," Erschen, 55, said. "We all know we're being called together for a reason that is bigger than our vision."

It is his generous giving of his time, emotional and physical support and resources without expecting anything in return while still daily addressing his own health concerns and running a growing company that earned Dan Erschen recognition as the 2016 Freeman Citizen of the Year.

See ERSCHEN, PAGE 4A



Submitted photo

Dan Erschen at the Bike MS ride of 2016. Through a healthier lifestyle and exercise Erschen has been able to go from barely able to walk due to his MS symptoms to completing Ironman triathlons.

#### From the pen of Dan Erschen:

- "You certainly do not have to do an Ironman to make your life better ... pick your own journey. I'm so thankful I was able to do this and I hope you pick a worthwhile journey of your own. Anything is possible!
- If I were to give you a few suggestions, my suggestions would be very simple.
- Have faith, know that God loves you, is with you and has a plan for you. Open your mind and heart and allow Him to work with you.
  - Pick a part of your life that you would like to improve upon and commit to improving it (I would highly recommend to at least consider exercise ... it gave me my life back).
  - Ask for help ... when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. You don't have to do it alone.
  - Be consistent. Work on it every single day with actions ... not just intentions.
  - Be patient.
  - Enjoy the journey ... it will be worthwhile.
  - Love and show appreciation for those who help you along the way.
  - Love and help as many people as you can along the way."

## State DPI race, other primaries on Tuesday ballot

By Lauren Anderson  
Freeman Staff

WAUKESHA — Voters in municipalities across Waukesha County will decide the candidates for several races in next week's primary election.

The primary will be held Tuesday. Information regarding polling places is available at myvote.wi.gov.

The race for state superintendent includes three candidates. Tony Evers, the current Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction chief, faces two challengers: John Humphries, a Dodgeville School District contractor, and Lowell Holtz, a retired superintendent in the Beloit and Whitnall school districts.

Contested races in Waukesha County include:

#### Village President, Lannon

Current Village President David Nagler faces two challengers, Jerry Newman and Tom Gadex. Voters will be asked to cast one vote for a candidate.

#### Village Trustee, Pewaukee

Seven candidates have thrown their hats in the ring for village trustee in Pewaukee. They include incumbents Paul Evert and Cathy Baumann, and Edmund Hill, Carole Stramm, Bob Rohde, Meaghan McBride Hayes and Colleen Clancy. Voters will be asked to cast votes for three candidates.

#### Elmbrook School Board

Three are running for the Elmbrook School Board's Area III seat. They include newcomers Jimmy Schulgit, Jian Sun and Leanne Wied. The top two vote-getters from that election will advance to the April 4 election.

#### Mukwonago School Board

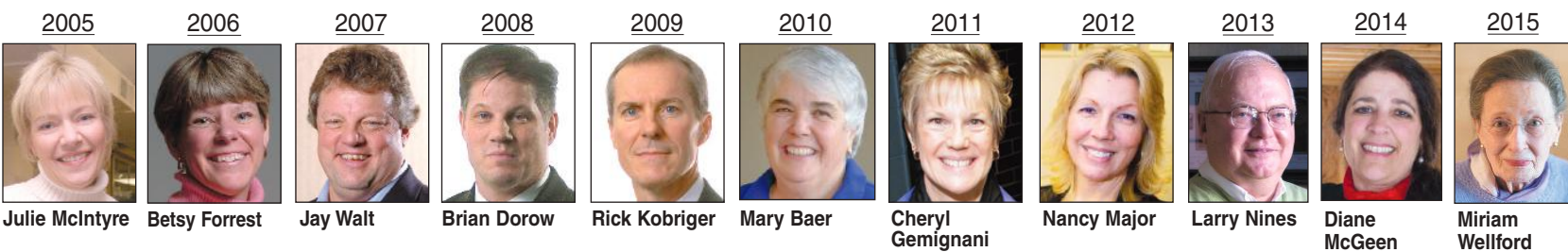
Four will vie for the Central Region seat on the Mukwonago School Board. Candidates include Laura Prokop, Charles Harwood, Jill Werner and Douglas Schmidbauer. The primary will whittle the pool down to two candidates.

#### Oconomowoc School Board

In the Oconomowoc Area School District, six hopefuls are running for the two School Board seats up for election in April. The candidates include incumbents Mike Bickler and Sandy Schick and challengers Glenn Cochrane, Samuel Levin, Dan Raasch and James Wood. The top two vote-getters will advance to the general election.

Email: landerson@conley.net

## Past Freeman Citizens of the Year



### INDEX

- Business.....8A, 9A
- Classified.....6B
- Comics.....8B, 4C
- Crosswords.....5B, 8B
- Ask the Doctors..8B
- Lottery.....2A
- Obituaries.....7A
- Opinion.....6A
- Sports.....1B
- TV.....1C, 2C, 3C
- Weather.....10A

Volume 158, No. 232

## Fun Things To Do This Weekend

"Blithe Spirit," 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. today, 2 p.m. Sunday, Waukesha Civic Theatre, 264 W. Main St., Waukesha. 262-547-0708, www.waukeshacivictheatre.org

"It Might as Well be Swing," 8 p.m. today, 3 p.m. Sunday, Sunset Playhouse, 800 Elm Grove Road, Elm Grove. 262-782-4430, www.sunsetplayhouse.com

Waukesha Rotary Pancake Breakfast, 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. today, Waukesha County Expo Center Arena, 1000 Northview Road, Waukesha. \$5 in advance, \$8 at the door. Kids 5 and under eat free. Fundraiser for the

Waukesha Rotary Club. www.waukesharotary.org

Prairieville Desperados, 1 p.m. today, Wern Valley Sportsmen Club, S36-W29657 Wern Way, Town of Waukesha. Give Cowboy Fast Draw shooting a try. Everything supplied.

Spring Treasures Craft and Art Show, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. today, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Waukesha County Expo Center Forum, 1000 Northview Road, Waukesha. \$3 admission, free for children 15 and younger. \$1 coupon on website. www.craftproductionsinc.com

Back to Bach, 3 p.m. Sunday, Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts, 19805 W. Capitol Drive, Brookfield. Wisconsin Philharmonic concert featuring Frank Almond on violin. 262-547-1858 or at the office, 234 W. Main St. No. 9, Waukesha.

Coin show, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Oshkosh Convention Center, 2 N. Main St., Oshkosh. No admission fee. Held by Wisconsin Coin Expos LLC. 70 tables of dealers from across Midwest.

Oconomowoc Winter Farmers Market, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday, Oconomowoc High School cafeteria, 641 E. Forest St., Oconomowoc.

### WEATHER



Tomorrow: Partly cloudy  
High 54  
Low 38

See complete forecast on 10A



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# 'The community part of it is so powerful'

## Erschen

From Page 1A

### A difficult diagnosis

When Erschen was 29 years old, his first major health crisis occurred on April 4, 1990, when his hands fell asleep and within three days he was not able to walk, nor did he have enough strength and coordination to lift a fork in order to feed himself. Doctors diagnosed Erschen with Guillain-Barre syndrome, which has MS-like symptoms, but which comes on faster. At that time, Erschen was hospitalized for three weeks and spent three months in physical and occupational therapy. After that period, Erschen was able to button his shirt and tie his shoelaces once again, but the next year was difficult and it took about that amount of time until Erschen was able to walk normally again.

Then, his second major crisis occurred when Erschen was 39 years old in September 2009 while he was at a family wedding. While this bout caused Erschen to spend only a week in the hospital, he was barely able to walk for 1 1/2 years. The diagnosis this time was MS.

Erschen will always have symptoms, but his daily health has improved so that he is able to run his company and work out regularly thanks to his Copaxone medication, healthy diet and physical routine.

He, in turn, has run four Ironman triathlons, three of which he completed. An Ironman triathlon consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bicycle ride and a marathon 26.22-mile run.

But getting in shape to run an Ironman triathlon started with small steps. On the first day, Jan. 1, 2002, Erschen said he stretched and used the elliptical trainer because he had to use something he could hold on to because he could hardly walk. His time in the gym lasted only a handful of minutes.

"After that first five minutes on the elliptical, the tingling sensations and weakness from the MS symptoms were so bad that I was wiped out for the rest of the day," Erschen wrote about his journey.

### Helping others with MS

After assisting others with MS participate in a triathlon



Submitted photo

John Plumitis, Lynn Groth and Dan Erschen share a laugh during the indoor triathlon.

at Westwood Health and Fitness in Waukesha, Erschen realized that they now had nowhere to go for the same type of camaraderie and acceptance. So he opened up the gym he established at his growing company, Wisconsin Metal Parts, to a few people he had met with MS.

"Everyone was excited and making progress and then there was no place for them to go," Erschen said.

The number of people who came to the gym with MS continued to increase as news of the facility spread by word of mouth. And along with it, the number of pieces of equipment. The gym now welcomes about 50 people with MS.

"People come all the way from China to be here," Erschen said. That is not an exaggeration. One participant was diagnosed with MS while living in China and returned to the U.S. and joined Erschen's gym.

In a matter of days, a difference can be observed in the people who use the gym. "The community part of it is so powerful," Erschen

said.

Todd Siewert, who nominated Erschen for Freeman Citizen of the Year, can attest to that. He has been coming to the gym almost since it opened.

"I can only imagine what it would be like if I had not found this place," Siewert said. "It has just been a transformation."

Siewert was diagnosed with MS more than 20 years ago when he was in his 30s. By going to the gym and pushing himself to overcome obstacles, Siewert said he became healthier.

"Once you start building up endurance, you can start getting past endurance issues," he said.

Last year, Siewert participated in the Bike MS, a ride from Pewaukee to Whitewater to Madison.

This year, Erschen hopes to have his group, the Peppy Pedalers, have the most members with MS of any registered group.

Erschen said there are four key factors to successfully dealing with MS: nutrition, exercise, proper rest, and a need of a community. Working with a doctor and finding a medication that works is also important, he said.

It's been four years since Erschen opened up his gym to others with MS and he feels the results have been astounding.

"It's probably the most powerful thing in my life," he said.

### 'A place of miracles'

Often when people first arrive at Wisconsin Metal Parts to use the gym, Erschen said they are dealing with depression and have not been physically active in some time.

"The big thing is to keep them moving," he said. Without that, atrophy sets in. "What we've really learned through the years with exercise is there's nothing you can do to make your MS worse."



Submitted photo

Dan Erschen with his wife, Bonnie.

The gym is described as a "no whine zone."

"Everyone here has some form of it and everyone understands what's going on," Siewert said. "It's really turned their lives around."

Chrissy Aukofer, who travels to the gym from the Town of Ottawa, said she is grateful.

"We always thank him for this place and he's like, 'I am just happy you came here,'" she said.

Carol Murdock of Pewaukee describes the gym as "the best place on Earth. It's a place of miracles."

When she first started coming about two years ago, she said she fell off the full body machine, but now there is nothing she can't do.

"He really encourages us to do things we think we can't do," Murdock said of Erschen.

Chris Wegner of Greendale said she has never met a "more giving person" than



Dan Erschen receives a hug from Chrissy Aukofer during the 2015 Christmas party.

Submitted photo

Dan who helps his employees, his family and everyone else.

One person who attends Erschen's gym wasn't able to feed herself and was wheelchair-bound when she first arrived. But, after spending time at the gym, she is now able to feed herself and walk with some assistance.

>> Continued on next page

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# 'We are building the next generation to be stronger than this generation'

From Page 4A

Although he recently had a bad three-month bout with MS, Gawlick was back at the gym recently working out and helping others.

"It's a pretty amazing place under a metal roof," he said. "I respect Dan so much for all that he is doing."

## Creating a business

Erschen started what was to become Wisconsin Metal Parts in 1988 because he and his wife, Bonnie, were not having a good time with day care for their daughter Samantha. Dan stayed home with Samantha for the first 1 1/2 years and started the business out of their basement designing dies and then Bonnie stayed home after the business was moved out of the basement in 1990.

The main operations are still located at N4-W22450 Bluemound Road, but since it was founded, it has expanded into two other buildings nearby. And now, Erschen said Wisconsin Metal Parts is growing out of the third.

He credits the company's growth to investing in newer technology, which allows him to tap into another market. Recently, a spin-off start-up called Lean Manufacturing Products, Inc. was started that offers period solutions for eliminating wasted time and space while increasing flow by utilizing vertical space efficiently. It is headed by his son, Jacob.

Erschen said he operates Wisconsin Metal Parts through a servant leadership model that results in empowering people, focuses on the development of employees and encourages them to perform as highly as possible. The company employs about 100 workers.

"We are building the next generation to be stronger than this generation," Erschen said. To encourage the next generation to go into manufacturing, Erschen serves on an advisory committee for tool and die at Waukesha County Technical College and brings in students to Wisconsin Metal Parts to expose them to a career in manufacturing.

Joe Pease, general manager of Wisconsin Metal Parts, has known Dan for about 30 years after meeting at their place of work. He said even though they grew up in different parts of the state, the two men had similar interests and formed a friendship that took them hunting, fishing and berry picking.

When Erschen left to start his own company, the men stayed in contact and about 16 years ago, Pease moved over to Wisconsin Metal Parts to help Erschen run the operation.

"His MS is not business-friendly when it gets stressed, that sort of thing," Pease said. "I took on the customers. I took on the problem-solving, complaint department."

The two men continued to spend a lot of time together driving to meet with customers and problem-solving.

"Dan has always been a people-driven person," Pease said, adding that after his MS diagnosis that trait was even more visible.

As the business continued to do better, Pease said Erschen was able to help his employees more by forming a bonus program. It's also an open-book management company so the employees have access to its financial numbers.

"Dan allows people to grow inside the company as much as they want to," Pease said.

He even helps them seek other opportunities, whether through education or with other employers. "They can go pursue other opportunities. We looked at (one employee's) résumé, we helped him. Never once did it get negative. It's like your family. Treating your family like you would your children. It's like I have 100 children, some of them are older than me," Pease said.

While Erschen could easily make other choices, Pease said he is "driven to help humanity in some way, shape or form."



Wisconsin Metal Parts employees saying "We are here for you!"



Dan Erschen's family with his dad, John, during his 80th birthday party on Feb. 4, 2017. Pictured from left to right are: back row, Jake Thurner, Samantha Erschen-Thurner; and front row, Jacob Erschen, John Erschen, Bonnie Erschen and Dan Erschen.



Dan Erschen at the MS Bike Ride of 2016.

about it. If they reach out to him there is nothing held back."

That even extends to taking employees with alcohol addictions to meetings and then sitting there with them so they are comfortable.

"He will provide the resource, but you will have to at least step through the door," Pease said.

## Family matters

Erschen met his wife of 32 years at a Pewaukee laundromat where she was working and he came in to do his laundry. He said he pretended like he was "dumber than a box of rocks" about doing his laundry and she's helped him ever since — and "with so much more than laundry."

He later returned to the laundromat and asked a co-worker for Bonnie's number. Bonnie said she had been hoping he would come back because he was such a nice guy.

The City of Pewaukee couple eventually welcomed a son and a daughter, who are now grown. Daughter Samantha even married one of Dan's friends and a volunteer at the gym, Jake Thurner.

"He is the most loving and giving and understanding and I always say the best guy in the whole wide world. I couldn't ask for a better husband," Bonnie Erschen said.

They like to go hiking with their Weimaraner, Daisy May, bike riding and travel.

"We like to travel, but situations kind of limit us to going other places because of people we take care of. We just like to spend time together; it doesn't matter what we are doing," she said.

As his parents, John and Janet, get older, Erschen tries to help them still enjoy their hobbies and will be going with his dad to Branson, Mo., for fishing soon.

Family has always been important for Erschen, who grew up as one of eight kids in Hazel Green on the southwest side of the state. Growing up, he said he spent much of his time outside playing, hunting and fishing. He also was athletic and competed in cross country, finishing ninth in his state one year. It was through high school cross country that Erschen said he learned how important

community was, a resource he later fell back on when he was diagnosed with MS.

Bonnie Erschen remembers the fear the couple felt when Dan was first diagnosed and their daughter was 18 months old. There was a time when they worried they would not be able to have a second child.

"Once he changed his diet and started leading a healthier life a lot of those fears lifted," she said. "There is still a fear of if I am going to be in a wheelchair."

The MS has limited the family's life in several ways, including that they don't go out much at night anymore, which is when the MS often acts up. Bonnie said Dan also has a tendency to push himself so as not to hold anyone back.

"When he gets out of the car and he can hardly walk back into the house is heart-breaking for me to see him like that," she said. "He has never been a selfish guy. Even through this MS story, he always put others first."

That's also reflected in his company ownership. Bonnie Erschen said one year the couple took money out of their savings account,

which was already fairly depleted, so they could buy the employees something for Christmas. Or if Dan passes someone whose car is in the ditch, he'll be the first to stop to help pull them out.

"I am just trying to help other people. It's kind of a self-centered world. If it could be more of a selfless world, it would be a better place," he said.

Jake Thurner started out as a friend and is now a family member. He developed a friendship with Dan while participating in a running group at Westwood Health and Fitness. There, Thurner said Dan took him under his wing and showed him how to ride a road bike and got him into triathlons. He then helped Erschen open up his shop gym to people with MS and later was introduced to Dan's daughter, Samantha. The couple has been married for a little more than nine months.

"He's always there to give advice and to help out. He

has a unique perspective on life, very positive and very, very willing to help people," Thurner said. "He has a big heart for helping people. He is very supportive of his friends and family."

Thurner said his positive nature is contagious.

"Some people that come into the gym, you can tell that they are a little down. Dan doesn't give them any slack whatsoever. He puts them to work and does it in a cheerful way. After a few minutes people start to laugh and have fun," Thurner said, adding Dan does "talk the talk and walk the walk."

"He is a really, really good friend. And now he's my father-in-law and he's an amazing father-in-law," Thurner said. "He has a big heart for the MS community and helping people in general. He's a great role model and a great example of what a person can be."

Email: kmichalets@conley.net

## LOCATION AND HOURS OF POLLING PLACE

At the Spring Primary Election to be held on February 21, 2017, in the Town of Brookfield, the following polling place locations will be used for the wards indicated:

Location	Wards
Town Hall 645 N. Janacek Road Brookfield, WI	Wards 1, 3, 4, 9 & 10
St. John's Lutheran Church 20275 Davidson Road Brookfield, WI	Wards 2, 5, 6, 7 & 8

ALL POLLING PLACES WILL OPEN AT 7:00 A.M. AND WILL CLOSE AT 8:00 P.M.

All polling places are accessible to elderly and disabled voters.

If you have any questions concerning your polling place, contact the municipal clerk.

Jane F. Carlson  
645 N. Janacek Road  
Brookfield, WI 53045  
262-796-3788  
Monday thru Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

CITY OF WAUKESHA LOCATION AND HOURS OF POLLING PLACES	
At the Spring Primary Election to be held on Tuesday, February 21, in the City of Waukesha, the following polling locations will be used for the wards indicated:	
ALDERMANIC DIST. 1 Wards 1 & 2	ELKS LODGE 2301 Springdale Road
ALDERMANIC DIST. 2 Wards 3, 4 & 5	CITY HALL 201 Delafield Street
ALDERMANIC DIST. 3 Wards 6, 7 & 8	ROTARY BUILDING 1150 Baxter Street
ALDERMANIC DIST. 4 Wards 9, 10 & 11	HAWTHORNE SCHOOL 1111 Madland Drive
ALDERMANIC DIST. 5 Wards 12 & 13	MEADOWBROOK SCHOOL 3130 Rolling Ridge Drive
ALDERMANIC DIST. 6 Wards 14, 15, 40, 46 & 47	F. B. SHURTS BUILDING 810 W. College Avenue
ALDERMANIC DIST. 7 Wards 16, 17, 41	PRAIRIE SCHOOL 1801 Center Road
ALDERMANIC DIST. 8 Wards 18 & 19	ST. MARY'S CHURCH 225 South Hartwell Avenue
ALDERMANIC DIST. 9 Wards 20, 21 & 42	HEYER SCHOOL 1209 Heyer Drive
ALDERMANIC DIST. 10 Wards 22, 23, 24, 43 & 48	WAUKESHA SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL Fisher Tomp Avenue 401 E. Roberts Avenue
ALDERMANIC DIST. 11 Wards 25, 26, 27, 28 & 29	E & R UCC Church 413 Wisconsin Avenue
ALDERMANIC DIST. 12 Wards 30, 31, 44, 45 & 49	WAUKESHA WEST HIGH SCHOOL South Entrance by Auditorium 3301 Saylesville Road
ALDERMANIC DIST. 13 Wards 32, 33, 34 & 39	BETHESDA SCHOOL 730 S. University Drive
ALDERMANIC DIST. 14 Wards 35 & 36	FIRESTATION #5 3051 Summit Avenue
ALDERMANIC DIST. 15 Wards 37 & 38	BLAIR SCHOOL 301 Hyde Park Avenue
All polling places are accessible to elderly and disabled voters	
THE POLLING PLACES WILL OPEN AT 7:00 A.M. AND CLOSE AT 8:00 P.M.	
Visit <a href="https://myvote.wi.gov">https://myvote.wi.gov</a> for ward and polling location information, contact the Clerk's Office at 262-524-3550, or email <a href="mailto:clerk@ci.waukesha.wi.us">clerk@ci.waukesha.wi.us</a>	
<p>WAUKESHA CITY CLERK 201 DELAFIELD STREET WAUKESHA, WI 53188 (262) 524-3550 8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. <a href="http://WWW.CI.WAUKESHA.WI.US">WWW.CI.WAUKESHA.WI.US</a></p>	